

Howard Hunt

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E. Howard Hunt lives a second-chance life and loves it so much that just thinking about it brings tears to his eyes.

"I'd say I'm a man who has lived through a lot and is beginning to enjoy his golden years," said the 63-year-old Watergate conspirator as he padded contentedly about his four-bedroom Miami Shores home this week.

Hunt's mellow mood stems in part from a sense of vindication: Last week a Miami federal jury awarded him \$650,000 in libel damages from the Liberty Lobby

enjoys 'his golden years'

for linking Hunt's name to the John F. Kennedy assassination.

According to Hunt, the verdict "unleashed a pent-up amount of interest" in him. Radio interviews, a lecture contract and inquiries about a movie to be based on one of his books have come his way since.

The verdict — and the Christmas season — also released in Hunt a flood of bittersweet memories and hope for a peaceful, more prosperous future "by a lake where the bass are biting, or maybe somewhere in the Virgin Islands."

Ten years ago, Hunt was at the White House watching President Nixon lighting the national Christmas tree. Public-relations executive, successful author,

former CIA officer, consultant to the White House, Hunt was at the high point of his life. "My income was ... quite substantial," he said. "We had a nice place in suburban Maryland in the white-fence country."

A little more than a year later, Hunt had lost his first wife in an airplane crash, pleaded guilty to conspiracy in the Watergate break-in and started a prison term that brought him near despair. By 1979, he says, his income had fallen to \$21,000.

This year Hunt will take a break from his late-night writing routine to celebrate the holidays with his Manx tabby cat, his 2½-year-old son Austin (Hunt's "sweet

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and his wife, Laura, 34, a language teacher.

One of his four grown children, attorney Kevan Hunt, 28, will be home. Laura Hunt already has bought her husband's Christmas present — a re-issue of the original Scribner's version of "Treasure Island." It's "the stuff of which my literacy was formed," said Hunt, the author of 57 books — mostly spy novels.

Hunt said he'll cook the Christmas turkey and, as usual, celebrate with the neighborhood family of Manuel Artime, a friend from the time of the Bay of Pigs invasion, which Hunt helped plan.

Hunt's mellow mood doesn't extend to everyone — especially not G. Gordon Liddy or Richard Nixon. Asked about Liddy's new chain of detective agencies, Hunt said, "It's as preposterous as many of his other initiatives, and that's all I'm going to say about it."

Hunt continued: "I think Liddy made a very conscious decision to keep his mouth shut as he did for many years so he could do the book that has brought him so much fame and money. I don't have any moral objection to that, but I do think ... that if he felt it right to talk at all, he should have talked in 1972 ... as a point of honor. What's the difference? It's simply this — that now he's getting paid a great deal of money, and then there would have been no money at all.

"I wouldn't have gone to prison — most of the (Watergate conspirators) wouldn't have gone to prison, if Liddy had talked," said Hunt, who pleaded guilty to charges of conspiracy, second-degree burglary

and wiretapping, testified and then spent 33 months in federal prisons, including the one near Eglin Air Force Base in Florida.

Adding insult to injury, Hunt said people on the street often mistake him for Liddy. "I stalk away from them ... I resent the identification with him," Hunt said. Lured once to the "Today" show without knowing Liddy would be there, too, Hunt said he refused to say a word to Liddy.

As for Nixon, Hunt said: "The man has no shame at all ... I don't know of a single person who went to prison for him to whom he's ever extended an apology, much less a helping hand."

Hunt maintains that the Watergate break-in was a "political crime" for which he was unduly punished. "There was never a dime stolen — it was not a mercenary activity," he said. "Nobody suffered. There was not even a light bulb broken. Nothing was really done."

Hunt said the superiors who gave the orders are the only ones who should have been held responsible, "if anyone was held responsible."

Looking back, Hunt said he sees only one "monumental" mistake he regrets — his decision to go to work for the Nixon White House. "Once I was in, then everything flowed from that," he said. "How do you say no, once you're working in the White House?"

Hunt's Miami home is filled with his own surreal landscape paintings, all with a cross-hatch pattern in the upper right corner, symbolizing Hunt's imprisonment for his role in Watergate.

Hunt doesn't like to talk about

1982



The Miami News - BILL REINKE

In his study at home, author and ex-spy Howard Hunt enjoys his second chance at life.

prison. "It was a very traumatic experience," he said. "I didn't get country-club treatment. (Prison) was very depressing to me, because I never really identified myself with the ... criminal elements I was in prison with. I wasn't a rapist, wasn't a murderer, wasn't a burglar, wasn't a hold-up man, wasn't a wife-beater or child-molester."

While some Watergate conspirators got light sentences, Hunt said his own suffering in prison was so great that he feared he'd die. A

book he wrote surreptitiously in prison didn't sell: "The (publishers') thesis was that Watergate guys more or less deserve what was coming to them ... but Mr. Liddy and I had a rather prolonged and very difficult and barbaric prison experience. I don't think publishers wanted to hear about it."

In his books, and in discussion of news events, Hunt minces no words about his views of politics and intelligence activities.

In a climactic passage in Hunt's recently published book, "The Gaza

Intercept," the president of the United States delivers an ultimatum to the Soviet ambassador: Stay out of the Middle East, or face war with the United States.

"That's the way it ought to be done," Hunt said. "We don't want to hear anything from the Soviets about it, and we're behind the state of Israel and will guarantee it. And the Soviets can take up their quarrels with us."

Hunt's book recounts the exploits of a Mossad (Israeli intelligence) super-spy tapped to prevent Arab

terrorists from exploding a nuclear device over Tel Aviv.

Hunt also has plenty to say about current events:

✓ Khadafy hit squads: "I don't see why there's so much skepticism on the part of the press."

✓ Reagan: "The first president in memory who in domestic policy announced things as they are — hard times."

✓ Europe: "If they don't want to defend themselves, then hell, it's time (for the United States) to get out. We don't need them."

✓ Soviet Union: "If they think you're going to shoot them in the belly, they'll back down, but you cannot deal with them in terms of a cup of tea and a frosted cookie ... To them moral persuasion is nothing. We cannot approach the outside world, the real world, in terms of our own morality."

In intelligence activities, Hunt said, the Soviet Union sets the limits, and, Hunt said, "I can't think of any (limits). After all, the CIA is the front-line arm of the United States in security terms. Where the national security rests on the acquisition of information or elimination of adversaries, I don't think any sensible line can be drawn. This is a very cruel world we're dealing with."

In his personal life, Hunt said he is "a prayerful man" who lives "according to Judeo-Christian tenets."

"I think that's one thing that directed me away from any personal bitterness or spirit of vengeance ... I feel there's a residual amount of bitterness I probably never will be able to shake," Hunt said. "But as for personal vengeance, no, I haven't any of that."

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